

JANUARY 24, 1980

Everybody down here in the Shortgrass Country says their sheep and cattle are wintering in good shape. Some of the herders claim their stock is doing better this winter on less feed than previous winters. I overheard a guy say the other day at the bank that he hoped it never did rain again in the fall if it meant having a winter like this one.

Where he was puffing smoke rings was not the lack of rain but the amount of wind we got in the fall and early winter. The Shortgrass Country, you see, often catches northerners off that rich cow country and farmland that has from 16 to 18 percent digestible protein.

When those winds come just right off the fields and the feedlots, all an old cow has to do to supplement herself is to be able to breathe. We get nitrogen fertilizers and chaff from hay and several kinds of feedlot rations.

Not many operators know or appreciate the advantage, but lots of old ewes and hollow horned cows have raised their lambs and calves to potbellied perfection on the rich drafts of air that come from our more prosperous neighbors.

Air range supplement is the purest form of free choice feeding. The ingredients and the price are free. It comes in a wide variety of quantities and qualities. Animals brought in from the east will suffer from bloat or overeating disease until they become adjusted, but after they have learned how to hold their breath and when to inhale, I'd rather winter on a steady wind than I had to own 4/5ths interest in a feedmill located in a big irrigated alfalfa patch.

One winter, and it was a hard one, we lambed on the salt and meal that blew into the pastures. That spring we marked over a 100 percent lamb crop. The old boy's troughs were exactly right to keep us in feed. About every other day, a gust of north wind brought in the right amount of supplement. I liked it a lot better than working and worrying over feed bills.

Like any other feeding practice, the time to watch out is in the spring. Cattle and sheep will be doing fine until those spring breezes begin to come. You have to watch the rollovers in the feedlots and keep check on the way those farmers are treating their land. I've seen dust come in from up there in March, or early April, that looked as rich as the gold market, but it sure isn't that dependable in quality after the wind has blown hard all winter.

The past week has been warm and still at the ranch. I've noticed the old cows bawling earlier and longer for feed. Unless we get a little grass to bother them, however, I think we have this winter whipped. It's great to live in a country that has so many advantages, even if we do have to depend on the wind to make a living.